

## **K-3 Intervention and Class Size Reduction**

### **January 23, 2006**

- I. General comments on rigor and relevance (Remainder of comments from previous session on rigor and relevance in high schools)
  - A. Not only what is taught (course names or years of a subject) but also how it is taught and what is expected of the students. (Complex problems, high-level thinking, real world applications, etc.) In other words, every one of our classrooms needs a quality teacher who has high expectations for each student and teaches a rigorous curriculum.
  - B. Discussion paper issued by the State Board, “Improving Rigor and Relevance in the High School Curriculum”
  - C. How do you know a school is considered rigorous?
    - i. High expectations for students (graduation requirements, attendance)
    - ii. Rigorous courses (high level courses, AP, dual-credit, PSEO) (all students have access and are expected to achieve)
    - iii. Quality teaching
- II. K-3 Class Size
  - A. Iowa Early Intervention Block Grant Program was established in 1999.
    - i. This program consisted of school districts developing a class size management strategy to work toward class sizes in basic skills instruction for K-3 at a one teacher to 17 students and to improve instruction in the basics.
    - ii. The department identified diagnostic assessment tools as stipulated by law and has also identified research-based strategies for instructional interventions. These are located on the content network pages on the department’s website.
    - iii. Districts were also required to inform parents on a biannual basis of their child’s performance and the actions that parents could take to help improve skills.
    - iv. School districts also incorporated their actions to improve the basics in the Comprehensive School Improvement Plans that are available to the public on many school districts websites and on file at the department. The department monitors the implementation of the CSIP’s on the school accreditation visits to each district.
  - B. Reports required by the legislature.
    - i. Annual report since 2001 that provides the statewide average school district class size, each district’s history of reaching the class size goal, and the expenditures for each district’s block grant.
    - ii. An additional requirement to this report was established last year to include each district’s enrollment in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and the number of students who are not proficient in reading in grade 4 for the most recent reporting period.
    - iii. Findings from these reports indicate the following:

1. Average class size increased in 2005-2006 for K, 1<sup>st</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades but remained unchanged for 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Class sizes for this current year are still below the class sizes in 1998-99. (p.3) It is difficult to ascertain what class sizes would be if the state had not experienced a downturn in revenues during this same period of time. Also, many school districts have chosen to use the funds not only to reduce class size but also to provide reading coaches and/or instructional aides that will not be accounted for in a general class size to teacher ratio. Smaller districts were more likely to meet the state goal of 17 students per classroom than larger districts. Districts with 600 students or fewer were at or below 17 students per classroom for K and 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Districts with fewer than 250 students were below 17 students for all K – 3 grades.
2. Additional information provided this year shows the number of enrolled students in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and the number of students who were not proficient in 03, 04, and 05. To protect the identity of specific students, any 4<sup>th</sup> grade class where there were 5 or fewer students that were not proficient is not reported. The summary table (p.79) shows that there are fewer students enrolled in 2005 than in 2003. We have provided a summary table for a quick glance at the state totals. It is much better to talk in % of change when looking at these numbers. In 2003-2004 76.2% of students were proficient in reading – in 2005 78.6% were proficient. When looking at these numbers I also wanted to know how many districts had improved their proficiency percentages over this period of time, so another table indicates that 41.6% of the districts improved the percent of students proficient from 2003 to 2004, and 62% of the districts improved the percent of students proficient from 2004 to 2005

### III. Achievement Gap

- A. Several years ago the department reviewed a number of studies on closing the gap to assist school districts and the department as we designed technical assistance through professional development. Robert Slavin has stated that “No single policy or program can ensure the school success of every child, but a combination of approaches can.” Kati Haycock has stated “...research is beginning to cut holes in long-held notions that schools have no power to overcome the disadvantages of home and neighborhood.” Although it is clear there is not one prescription to success, we did find common elements in the research.
  - i. Strong Administrative Leadership that includes providing resources, communicating progress and supporting the teachers and parents in implementing the programs, services, and activities needed.
  - ii. High expectations - Ample evidence shows that almost all students can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels. But equally clear is that some students are going to require more time to learn and will require more supports and different types of instruction. You can't very well expect students to achieve in an AP course if they don't have the

prerequisite skills. Thus, closing the gap starts very early and there is no such thing as too soon to start. Jencks and Phillips (The Black-White Test Score Gap) stated, “about half the gap between black 12<sup>th</sup> graders and their white peers might be closed by eliminating the differences that exist before children enter first grade.” The College Board in 1999 said, “The evidence indicates that we should be rapidly increasing availability and expanding access to high quality early childhood programs.”

High expectations must also be accompanied by strong supports for those who are struggling academically. Specific interventions such as tutoring, community mentors, before and after school extended learning opportunities, summer sessions, and extra school days for those who struggle can help.

- iii. Quality teachers – Nothing affects the achievement of low-income and/or minority students as much as the quality of the teaching they receive. Ron Ferguson from Harvard analyzed large-scale data sets and found that, after controlling for socio-economic status of students, the gap between black and white student achievement was explained almost entirely by differences in their teachers’ qualifications. Every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers, according to Ferguson, netted greater increases in student achievement than other, non-instructional uses of school resources. In many places in America low-income students have the least experienced and the least qualified teachers. This is not true in Iowa. In our annual NCLB report card issued this past August, the schools with the highest percent of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch had 29% of their teachers with advanced degrees and an average experience in teaching of 14.4 years. Our schools with the lowest % of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch has 27.5% of their teachers with advanced degrees and an average experience in teaching of 14.8 years. There was also only about \$700 difference in average salary. Thus, one of our very best ways to decrease the gap is to invest in the professional development of our teachers with research-based instructional strategies.
- iv. “Condition of Education Report.” The DE has reported the achievement of various subgroups since 2001. Beginning on page 115 there is a great deal of information on achievement, dropouts, and graduation rates. Some of the trends that we see:
  - 1. Have increased the numbers of African-American and Hispanic students that are now tested at 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Too frequently in the past the students who were absent or made a half-hearted effort to complete the test were not included in the test results. We now account for 99% of white students, 97% of African-American and Hispanic students.
  - 2. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade reading (p.118), white students have improved from 78.6% to 80.2% while African Americans have improved from 48.4% to 54.6% and Hispanic students from 52.6% to 54.7%. We also have

seen about the same amount of growth for students with IEPs, ELL, and low-income students. Although we have seen growth at 4<sup>th</sup> grade, you can see that we have not closed the gap – some prefer not to use the term close the gap because it could mean that some students do worse and some do better and thus there is no gap – the problem that really exists is that there simply are not enough students who are doing well who belong to groups that are characterized by color, poverty, special education needs, and failure to possess English as their primary and first language.

3. I wish I could report the same amount of growth for 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students in reading, but: 8<sup>th</sup> grade growth slowed even though all groups grew. The problem (p. 121) is that students decline across the board in the percent proficient; what is most disturbing is that the decline is even greater for African Americans and Hispanic students than white students. Although we are not alone in this drop in 8<sup>th</sup> grade achievement in the nation, it is certainly something that must be addressed. So as we talk about high school reform we must be very aware that preparation for high school is also part of the middle school experience.
4. 11<sup>th</sup> grade results begin on p 125 for reading – but I will make my comments about math for 11<sup>th</sup> graders since we have an upcoming session on improving math/science. (p. 135). We have increased the numbers of students taking the test but you will note we have lost ground in the percent of white students who are proficient; gained just a little with our African American students, and lost a little ground with Hispanic students since 2001. We also lost ground with our 11<sup>th</sup> grade students who are eligible for free/reduced meals and gained slightly with our students on IEPs.
5. One group of students that we forget to talk about is the difference we see between our female and male students regardless of other characteristics. On the whole, female students do better in reading than male students. In math, male students only do better at 4<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade and then not to the same degree of difference as females to males in reading. But, what is interesting is that if you look at the difference between males and females on the ACT (p.169), you find that those males who took the ACT score higher than the females who took the ACT.
6. The gaps in achievement for our black and Hispanic students continue through the results for ACT, with black scoring a composite of 17.9, Hispanic scoring 20, and white scoring at 22.2. One of the explanations for the difference could come from the course-taking patterns of our students. We find that our minority students are not enrolled at the higher levels of math and science that they need to be in order to score well on the ACT.
7. What you cannot tell from the charts in the COE is that by digging deeper into the data you will find that one of the primary

characteristics of students not doing well is poverty. For example, if you look at the achievement of Hispanic students who speak English fluently and who do not qualify for free/reduced price lunch, you would find that the group achieves at approximately the same level as the all-students group. Black students who do not qualify for free/reduced price lunches do significantly better than those who live in poverty. The same is true for Hispanic and white.

8. We are doing a better job of keeping students in school – in 1995 the dropout rate for African American students was almost 7% that year while in 2003-2004 it was 3.26%. Graduation rate (p. 146) has also increased for all students since 1996, with the largest growth occurring with the African-American population – increased 10% but we still do not graduate over 25% of our African American students and Hispanic students.

B. So what can we do?

- i. First, I will tell you about the achievement grant pilots – student achievement data will be available at the end of the 2005-2006 school year, but I will provide you with some of the strategies being undertaken.
  1. Four grants of \$125,000 awarded to West Liberty, Carroll, Davenport, & Des Moines School from legislation that established \$500,000 in pilots. The department had some Goals 2000 funds that districts had not totally expended so the DE awarded additional grants to Sioux City and Waterloo.
  2. Strategies undertaken by the grant recipients include:
    - Strong Leadership - Provision for and use of technology to analyze data, track student progress and add specific instructional or curriculum components to the classroom, additional training to principals for classroom observations, strategies for student-parent friendly schools through better communication and parent involvement which included 20 radio shows to inform and engage the public in Waterloo, parent/community forums and establishment of parent advisory committees.
    - High expectations - establishment of 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition teams, specific intervention strategies for struggling students through community partnerships, student advocates or mentors provision of tutorial services, summer school, Jump Start summers for students who are behind in classroom performance, homework clubs and specific academies in reading and mathematics which provide students with explicit instruction, additional support and help, and additional time. In one case a district is piloting some gender specific classrooms with African-American males.

- Quality teachers - Specific training to 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers with reading strategies to work with struggling readers. Funds were used for training, designing curriculum and lesson plans, modeling strategies for other classroom teachers, purchase of reading materials specific to student needs, cultural competency training, cooperative learning teams between special education teachers and regular classroom teachers.
- ii. In the upcoming session on PD I will outline the efforts being undertaken by the DE to address the learning needs of all of our students.
- iii. SF 245 required that every 8<sup>th</sup> grader develop a career plan beginning in the 2006-2007 school year. Department will have models ready this spring. This is important when one thinks about the course-taking patterns that ensure more rigorous opportunities and better preparation for postsecondary work. One model (Iowa Choices) will provide each Iowa high school access codes free of charge. Being provided through a partnership between Iowa College Student Aid Commission, College Planning Center and the DE. Used to cost a school between \$500 - \$1,000 to access the tools. This is a web-based career information delivery system, available 24/7 that provides not only career information but resources and academic counseling which has student assessments, college preparation modules. The 24/7 access provides parents the opportunities to view not only their own child's plans but the possibilities for employment, the requirements for college admission, financial aid, and the courses a student must take to be ready for postsecondary. The DE transferred the management of Iowa Choices to the Iowa College Student Aid Commission in November of 2004 to ensure greater access of career planning information to parents of middle and high school students. They also had personnel who could be readily available for training to schools, parents, etc. On-line training is now available free of charge.
  1. ICN sessions in April will provide training on models.
  2. Will also use the AEA network of high school trainers to provide assistance.
- iv. Focus on improving our school administration leadership staff.
- v. Provide resources for the additional supports that are needed for struggling students as evidenced by efforts taken by the grant recipient.
- vi. Provide professional development for our teachers that will give them the latest in research strategies to improve achievement.